

The ***Western Sandpiper*** (*Calidris mauri*) is a small shorebird that nests in coastal areas of western Alaska and Siberia. It is one of the most common shorebirds in North America, with a population estimated at 3.5 million in 1995. Data regarding population trends are seriously lacking; however, scientists strongly suspect its population is declining. It is very vulnerable to various threats rangewide given its restricted breeding area and a tendency to concentrate at key sites in its broadly dispersed non-breeding range. This species is ranked as **High Concern** in the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan and of **Moderate Concern** in the Canadian Shorebird Conservation Plan.



Photo: © Tim Bowman/USFWS

SHOREBIRD RECOVERY

WESTERN SANDPIPER

~ ACTION PLAN SUMMARY ~

Species Description & Population Outlook

The Western Sandpiper is a small, highly migratory sandpiper with no recognized subspecies. In breeding plumage, birds have arrow-like streaks on the breast and along the flanks, and a rufous crown, ear patch, and scapulars. Individuals have life-history differences according to their migratory distance. The population was estimated at 3.5 million birds in 1995 and scientists believe it is declining. A comprehensive monitoring program is needed to better understand population trends and status.

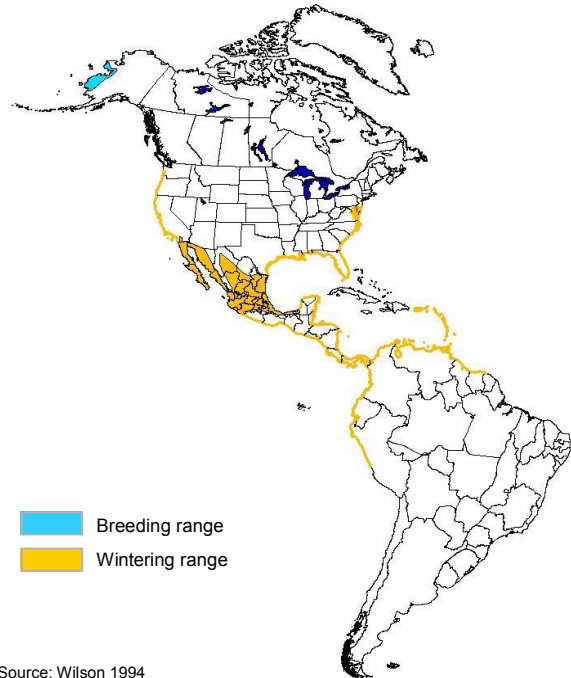
Migration

Western Sandpipers migrate thousands of kilometers overall but use a short-hop strategy, staying at various stopover sites for 1 to 5 days. Northbound migrants begin leaving tropical sites in February, using the Pacific Coast as well as interior routes to reach breeding grounds in western Alaska and Siberia. Southbound migrants begin departing in mid-June; adults leave before juveniles, and females before males. Most birds migrate along the Pacific Coast to dispersed wintering grounds (California to Peru), but some cross the interior to Atlantic Coast sites (North Carolina to Suriname).

- **Natural History:** Western Sandpipers have a restricted breeding range (western Alaska and Siberia), and a broadly dispersed nonbreeding range (California to Peru; North Carolina to Suriname). Females migrate farther south than males.
- **Nesting Habitat:** Low arctic and sub-arctic coastal plains with tundra dominated by dwarf birch, dwarf willow, crowberry, and tussock grass. Need elevated nesting areas close to wetlands (for feeding).
- **Foraging Habitat:** Prefer areas with a mix of silt and sand. During migration and winter, intertidal mudflats at coastal estuaries or shallow areas of inland lakes and ponds. Also suitable are tidal sloughs, salt marshes, beaches, dry or flooded agricultural areas, and managed wetlands such as salt ponds and sewage ponds.
- **Important Foods:** Breeding-season diet consists mostly of insects; nonbreeding-season diet, mostly marine invertebrates.

Threats

Known and potential threats **rangewide** include habitat loss and degradation from human disturbance, oil spills, contaminants, and water diversions; in the **nonbreeding-range** these include habitat loss from agriculture, coastal development, and aquaculture; and on Arctic **breeding grounds**, these include changes in habitat/resource conditions and availability from global climate change.



Source: Wilson 1994

This fact sheet is a summary of: Fernández, G., N. Warnock, D.B. Lank, and J.B. Buchanan. 2006. **Conservation Plan for the Western Sandpiper**, Version 1.0. Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences, Manomet, Massachusetts.

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For a copy of this and other species plans and summaries, please visit <http://www.whsrn.org/conservation-plans>.



Conservation Strategies and Actions

Priority research and conservation actions for the Western Sandpiper (sandpiper) include:

Implement range-wide, coordinated monitoring efforts to **assess the current population** overall as well as at specific sites and regions.

Restore habitat along the Pacific coast of northwest Mexico and **maintain salt ponds** in San Francisco Bay, California. **Designate sites** that meet WHSRN or Ramsar criteria. **Acquire lands or conservation easements** at critical sites in Washington, California, and Mexico.

Classify and assess habitats relevant to sandpipers within critical migration and wintering sites; create models that predict/identify potential sandpiper habitats for **regional conservation planning**.

Ensure implementation of **shorebird actions within various management plans** in Mexico, Panama, and Colombia. Revise plans to include such actions, particularly shorebird surveys and habitat assessments, wherever lacking.

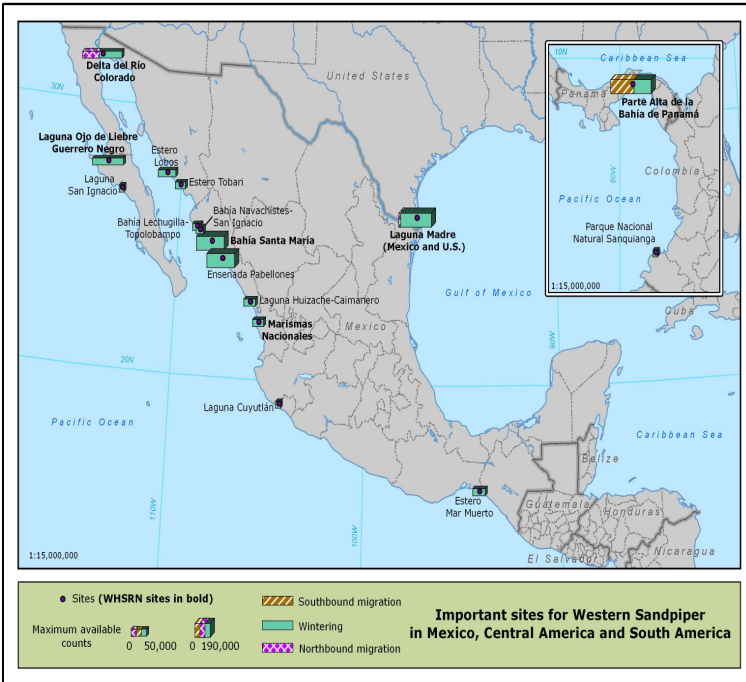
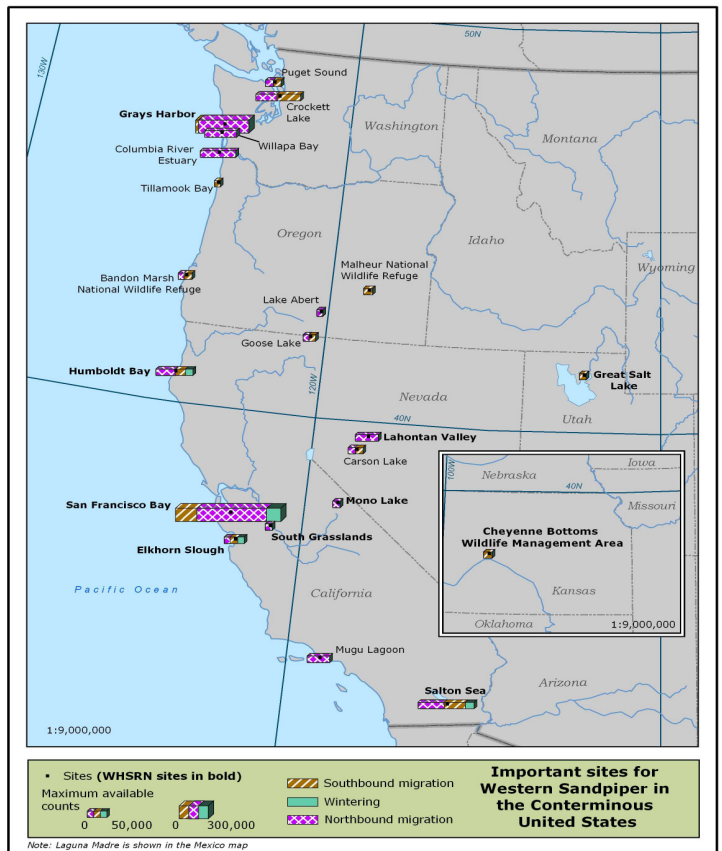
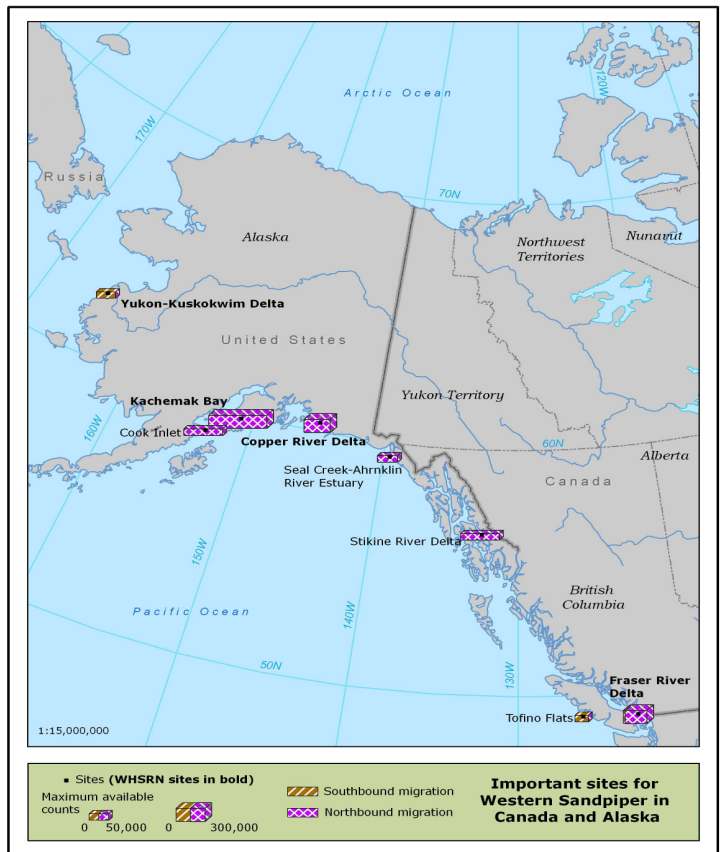
Using stable isotopes, genetic information, and radio telemetry, **determine the geographic origin and migratory routes** used by individual sandpipers, particularly those wintering in southeastern United States.

At sites experiencing habitat loss or degradation, **determine the negative effects of more densely concentrated populations** on birds' physical condition, productivity, and mortality.

Using demographic modeling, **determine the impact of events, processes, and stressors** from different regions or during lifecycle stages on population dynamics.

Conduct a comprehensive assessment of sandpiper habitats (condition, distribution, availability, use, and functional value), especially at smaller sites within complexes supporting large numbers of birds.

Determine the effects of contaminants, such as lead, oil, agricultural and industrial chemicals, on sandpiper health during migration and winter.



The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) is a partnership-driven, hemisphere-wide, site-based shorebird conservation initiative that began in 1985. It is facilitated by the WHSRN Executive Office, a program of the Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences located in Manomet, Massachusetts, USA. Learn more at <http://www.whsrn.org>.

